

Southern
Negro Women
and
Race
Coöperation



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Southern Negro Women and Race Co-Operation

We, the members of the Southeastern Federation of Colored Women's Clubs assembled in Atlanta, Ga. June 28, 29, 30, 1921, desire to state our position on some matters relating to the welfare of colored people and to enlist the sympathy and co-operation of Southern white women in the interest of better understandings and better conditions, as these affect the relations between white and colored people.

First of all we wish to express our sincere gratification in the fact that race relations in the South have advanced to the place where the white women of the South are conscious of the part which colored women must play in any successful effort to adjust the unhappy conditions about us which have distressed the hearts of all lovers of right and justice and dangerously threatened the common welfare and the safety of the Nation.

We are also keenly alive to the growing tendency to give a larger place to the influence of womanhood in the affairs of the Nation and to the fact that there is an increasing number of Southern white women

whose vision includes the welfare of women of every race and condition; who desire to secure equal opportunities for development to all womanhood and are determined to face the truth without flinching and to give themselves, at whatever cost, to creating an enlightened sentiment among their own people, and establishing a new and better foundation for relations between white and black women in the South.

We have for a long time been painfully conscious of the many unjust and humiliating practices of which colored women in the South have been victims. There is not one of us who has not at various times and places been called upon to face experiences which are common to the women of our race. We, therefore, take this opportunity to call to your attention certain conditions which affect colored women in their relations with white people, and which if corrected will go far toward decreasing friction, removing distrust and suspicion and creating a better atmosphere in which to adjust the difficulties which always accompany human contacts.

1. Conditions in Domestic Service

The most frequent and intimate contact of white and colored women is in domestic service. Every improvement made in the physical, moral and spiritual life of those so employed must react to increase the efficiency of their service to their employers. We, therefore, direct your attention to—

LONG AND IRREGULAR WORKING HOURS.

- (a) Lack of provision for wholesome recreation.
- (b) Undesirable housing conditions.

WE RECOMMEND, THEREFORE,

- (a) Definite regulation for hours and conditions of work.
- (b) Sanitary, attractive and wholesome rooming facilities.
- (c) Closer attention to personal appearance and deportment.
- (d) Provision for and investigation of character of recreation.

2. Child Welfare

The large burden of economic responsibility which falls upon many colored women results in their prolonged absence from home and the consequent neglect of the children of the homes. We direct your attention to—

CHILD WELFARE

- (a) Neglected homes (irregularity in food, clothing, conduct, training).
- (b) Truancy.
- (c) Juvenile delinquency.

We, therefore recommend—

WELFARE ACTIVITIES

- (a) Day nurseries, play grounds, recreation centers.
- (b) Home and school visitation.
- (c) Probation officers and reform schools.

3. Conditions of Travel

Race friction is perhaps more frequent in street cars and railroad trains than in any other public places. To reduce this friction

and remove causes for just complaint from colored passengers we call your attention to—

1. SEATING ACCOMMODATIONS ON STREET CARS.
2. UNSANITARY SURROUNDINGS.
 - (a) At Stations.
 - (b) On Trains.
3. TOILET FACILITIES.
 - (a) At Stations.
 - (b) On Trains.
4. DIFFICULTY IN SECURING.
 - (a) Tickets.
 - (b) Pullman accommodations.
 - (c) Meals.
5. ABUSE OF RIGHTS OF COLORED PASSENGERS BY TRAIN CREW AND WHITE PASSENGERS OCCUPYING SEATS WHILE PASSENGERS STAND, SMOKING, PROFANE LANGUAGE, OVERCROWDING.

CORRECTIVE MEASURES.

Provision of Equal Accommodations in all public carriers and courteous treatment at the hands of street car and railway officials, for all passengers.

4. Education

Without education for all the children of all the people we cannot sustain a democracy. Ignorance and crime are the twin children of neglect and poverty. We urge your increasing effort for—

BETTER EDUCATION FACILITIES.

- (a) Adequate Accommodations for all Negro children of school age.
- (b) Vocational Training in all secondary schools.
- (c) Improved rural schools—longer terms, suitable buildings.
- (d) Training schools for teachers.
- (e) Adequate Salaries for teachers.

5. Lynching

We deplore and condemn any act on the part of any men which would tend to excite the mob spirit.

We believe that any man who makes an assault upon any woman should have prompt punishment meted out to the limit of the law, but not without thorough investigation of the facts and trial by the courts.

The continuance of lynching is the greatest menace to good will between the races, and a constant factor in undermining respect for all law and order. It is our opinion that mob violence incites to crime rather than deters it; and certainly it is less effective in discouraging crime than the watchful, thorough and deliberate processes of a fair and just trial.

Toward the suppression of this evil we appeal to white women to—

- (a) Raise their voices in immediate protest when lynchings or mob violence is threatened.
- (b) Encourage every effort to detect and punish the leaders and participants in mobs and riots.
- (c) Encourage the white pulpit and press

in creating a sentiment among law-abiding citizens and urge outspoken condemnation of these forms of lawlessness.

6. The Public Press

In the great majority of cases the white press of the South gives undue prominence to crime and the criminal element among Negroes to the neglect of the worthy and constructive efforts of law-abiding Negro citizens. We feel that a large part of friction and misunderstanding between the races is due to unjust, inflammatory and misleading headlines and articles appearing in the daily papers.

We suggest that white women include in their local community program a united effort to correct this evil and to secure greatest attention to worthy efforts of Negro citizens.

7. Suffrage

We regard the ballot as the democratic and orderly method of correcting abuses and protecting the rights of citizens; as the substitute of civilization for violence.

As peace loving, law-abiding citizens we believe the ultimate and only guarantee of fair dealing and justice for the Negro, as well as the wholesome development of the whole community, lies in the peaceful, orderly exercise of the franchise by every qualified Negro citizen.

We ask therefore, that white women, for the protection of their homes as well as ours indicate their sanction of the ballot for all citizens as representing government

by the sober, reasoned and deliberate judgment of all the people.

In these articles offered at your request we are stating frankly and soberly what in our judgment, you as white women may do to correct the ills from which our race has so long suffered and of which we as a race are perhaps more conscious now than ever.

We recall how in the recent days of our nation's peril so many of us worked side by side for the safety of this land and defense of this flag which is ours as it is yours.

In that same spirit of unselfishness and sacrifice we offer ourselves to serve again with you in any and every way that a courageous facing of duty may require as you undertake heroically this self-appointed yet God-given task.

We deeply appreciate the difficulties that lie before you, but as you undertake these things which are destined to bless us all, we pledge you our faith and loyalty in consecration to God, home and country.

Respectfully submitted,

MRS. JOHN HOPE

MRS. MARION WILKINSON

MISS LUCY LANEY

MRS. CHARLOTTE HAWKINS BROWN

MRS. MARY JACKSON McCRORY

MRS. JANIE PORTER BARRETT

MRS. M. L. CROSTHWAIT

MRS. BOOKER T. WASHINGTON.

MRS. MARY McLEOD BETHUNE

President Southeastern Federation of
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